"If Sleepwalkers are wakened" – Fictional consistence and historical resistance through Lady Macbeth's figure in Gordon Bottomley's *Gruach* and in David Greig's *Dunsinane*

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Abstract: The paper examines how two definitively and determinedly historical approaches to Lady Macbeth's character in a prequel (Gordon Bottomley's *Gruach*) and a sequel (David Greig's *Dunsinane*), with notably similar techniques still take markedly different turns concerning their attitude towards the Shakespearean play. The approach of the prequel *Gruach* and the sequel *Dunsinane* can be said quite similar. Both rely on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in their creation, both consciously involve the Shakespearean universe at their inception and maintain the connection with the early modern tragedy on many levels. Both texts consciously avoid the title character, and feature Lady Macbeth, placing her in the centre of attention and revealing her historical past, her motivations, and her political ambitions. Yet, Comparing the two adaptive approaches will reveal that the characters in the adaptations will emerge with a strikingly different attitude towards the Shakespearean character (Lady Macbeth) and the text they derive from. The paper strives to show how similar mechanisms of adaptation based on historicity can result in disparate modes of compliance and resistance to the character analyses, the canonical position and the reliability of the origin-play, *Macbeth.*

Résumé : L'article examine comment deux approches délibérément et résolument historiques de la figure de Lady Macbeth dans une préquelle (*Gruach* de Gordon Bottomley) et une séquelle (*Dunsinane* de David Greig), malgré des techniques et des méthodes de travail similaires, entraînent des lectures et des attitudes nettement différentes envers le texte shakespearien. On peut dire que l'approche de la préquelle de *Gruach* et de la séquelle de *Dunsinane* est assez similaire. Tous deux s'appuient sur *Macbeth* de Shakespeare, tous deux impliquent consciemment l'univers shakespearien dans sa formation, et maintiennent

le contact à plusieurs niveaux avec la tragédie du début de l'époque moderne. Les deux textes évitent consciemment le personnage principal et mettent au centre de l'attention Lady Macbeth, révélant son passé historique, ses motivations et ses ambitions politiques.

Pourtant, en comparant les deux approches, il s'avère que les adaptations ont une interprétation remarquablement différente du personnage shakespearien (Lady Macbeth) et le texte dont elles sont issues. L'article cherche à montrer comment des mécanismes similaires d'adaptation basés sur l'historicité peuvent aboutir à différents modes de résistance et de conformité à l'analyse des des personnages, et à la position canonique de la pièce d'origine, *Macbeth*.

Keywords: prequel, sequel, adaptation, historicity, source, character analysis, *Dunsinane*, *Gruach*, Bottomley, Greig, politics, resistance, compliance, consistency, prejudice.

Mots-clés : préquelle, séquelle, historicité, source, analyse des personnages, *Dunsinane*, *Gruach*, Bottomley, Greig, politique, résistance, conformité, cohérence, préjudice.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has been several times appropriated and adapted through the centuries, and as a play parading larger-than-life characters with opaque declarations and impenetrable motivations, it offers ample material for the play to generate both prequels and sequels. Prequels and sequels have always been a problematic area of adaptation studies, as they are more often than not theoretically excluded from a "more restricted […] definition of adaptation as process and product" (Hutcheon 9). They are not considered adaptations mostly on the grounds of claiming that "there is a difference between never wanting a story to end – the reason behind prequels and sequels, according to Marjorie Garber1 […] – and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways" (Hutcheon 9). However, I think

there is a vastly different motivation behind prequels and sequels than what is stated here: their inception is not about "not wanting a story to end" (or wanting a story to begin somewhere else, for that matter), but is more about wanting to clarify, to pin down, to reinterpret the origin-play,2 and thus "retell the same story" (Hutcheon 9) by placing it in a different angle, within a different framework, but without actually altering the origin-text itself. The question of "what if," the "desire for repetition as much as change" (Hutcheon 9) are just as much present in prequels and sequels as in any other adapting mode, perhaps in a more subtle but equally derivative way. Prequels use the unclear or missing parts and gaps of their origin-play, creating (a possible) backstory, and sequels tend to build on (and play on) the possible consequences and effects of actions and events that had occurred in their predecessor – using it *as* a backstory for themselves.

Remarkably, two of these special types of adaptation written to *Macbeth* consciously avoid the title character, and feature Macbeth's mesmerizing wife, Lady Macbeth, placing her in the centre of attention and revealing her past, her motivations – and, quite unexpectedly for connoisseurs of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* her future. In this essay, I am going to examine how two determinedly historical approaches to Lady Macbeth's character in a prequel (Gordon Bottomley's *Gruach* from 1921) and a sequel (David Greig's *Dunsinane* from 2010), with notably similar techniques still take markedly different turns concerning their attitude towards the Shakespearean play. They are both fuelled by and hindered by Shakespeare's "undaunted mettle"3 of a woman, and both undergird and undermine the complexity of the notorious "unsexed" character concocted in the seventeenth century from history, legend, and fantasy. My scope of analysis will mainly rely on the problem of observing or avoiding aspects of historicity in the two adaptations working with sometimes quite similar techniques and still offering radically different conclusions. My aim is also to show how the figure of Lady Macbeth somehow seems to "resist" and deconstruct some of the main interpretations provided by the sequel and prequel adaptations.

Common ground

The way the prequel *Gruach* and the sequel *Dunsinane* approach *Macbeth* can be said to be quite similar. Both rely on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in their creation, both consciously involve the Shakespearean universe at their inception and maintain the connection with the early modern tragedy on many levels. They achieve this with a similar method: from a temporal point of view they strive to avoid Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* one precedes the time-span of its events, the other follows them, the first establishing a backstory of the couple's private life, while the other reveals a scenario of political consequences.

They also aim to rely more on the historical background, and both do this by reclaiming the history of the female protagonist. The focus is so markedly shifted onto her, that both authors eliminate the name of Macbeth almost completely. Bottomley lists him among the persons of the play and refers to him throughout as "an Envoy of the King of Scotland," and although he does introduce himself as Macbeth, the name is mentioned/written down only five times in the entire play. Greig is even more extreme in his avoidance of Macbeth because he is not once mentioned by name in *Dunsinane.* On the contrary, perhaps to distance themselves further from the unity of the couple established so carefully by Shakespeare, both plays grant Lady Macbeth her historical first name, Gruach. The Shakespearean Lady Macbeth existed within an unbreakable bond with Macbeth, joined by not only their deeds but also by their name – and this dramaturgically well-founded unison in their name is possibly not as much a result of Shakespeare's genius as of his ignorance – he probably had no idea what Lady Macbeth's name was, as none of his sources seem to contain the name Gruach. Despite the historical data surfacing over time she remained unnamed in the massively popular play for such a long time that in a review written in the nineteen-eighties Gary Schmidgall still seems to be amused by the fact that the historical name of Lady Macbeth is the "mal-euphonious Gruach" (389).

However, despite all the similarities in employing a historically refigured Lady Macbeth in their centre at the cost of consciously

marginalising Macbeth, it seems that the two plays reach vitally different conclusions and offer vastly different interpretations presenting dissimilar general attitudes towards the Shakespearean text.

Fictional consistence

Bottomley wrote his prequel in 1921, when bardolatry was still at its height, and, in a post-romantic frenzy on his greatness, Shakespeare was still generally considered as the ultimate genius of English literature, the great bard of England, the incessant source and summit of English pride. As such, his representations and interpretations were still subject to great interest and scrutiny – and anything slightly undermining this greatness would be condemned. Bottomley had been praised earlier for being "capable of *worthily* inventing a prelude"4 to *King Lear*, the critically acclaimed *King Lear's Wife*, in which he shifted the focal point of the Shakespearean play (Lear) to the missing mother/wife figure and the character of Goneril. It seems he was troubled by the same sentiment that decades earlier drove Mary Cowden Clarke to write her wildly popular5 backstory tales on *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines,* which was, according to William C. Carroll, the first work which – instead of the simple labelling Lady Macbeth "wicked" or "bad" or "demonic" – portrayed her with at least a degree of complexity if not considerable sympathy through presenting a troubled self-definition origination from infancy, and from losing a mother characterised by bitterness, rigid pride and ambition, rejecting her newborn.*6*

It was quite an "astonishing" turn for Bottomley's contemporaries, among them the already quoted Lascelles Abercrombie, that "the success [of the Lear-prequel] should be repeated in a prelude to *Macbeth*" (126). Bottomley follows a similar though more daring pattern in his prequel to *Macbeth* compared with *Lear's Wife.* The shift from the male to the female protagonist – just as in the case of *King Lear,* is apparent, although he did not have the freedom to create just *any* woman here (as he had had the potential with Queen Lear, about whom Shakespeare was conveniently tacit). He had to conform to the

serious expectations of the audiences (both readers and theatregoers) and critics of Shakespeare. As Robert B. Shaw aptly concluded, "[T]he emphasis of these plays is on character. Bottomley presents familiar Shakespeare figures at youthful, formative moments to show the quickening within them of those flaws and appetites that the famous tragedies display full-blown" (116). As Lady Macbeth was indeed one of the most fervently admired of these familiar Shakespeare figures of the time (especially after the noted representations of the character on stage by Sarah Siddons in the eighteenth century and Ellen Terry in the nineteenth century, the latter's – critically less acclaimed – performance captured in the iconic image painted by John Singer Sargent), Bottomley had to be cautious in how he would portray her.

Gruach, to fulfil expectations of the time, had to present a character that could provide a convenient entrance into the realms of the Shakespearean universe. To achieve this, Bottomley's heroine is not only of an eccentric and unstable mind, with overwhelming ambition and alluring beauty, but she also portrays the "proto-feminist" (Carroll) young woman who takes her fate into her own hands and liberates herself from the constraints of social and traditional expectations, precisely by choosing to escape with Macbeth. Macbeth/the Envoy is presented as a man who – despite all his strength and masculinity – is overcome by Gruach; her charms, her beauty, her sexuality and power deliberately foreshadow the complex and enigmatic Lady Macbeth and her seductive power of manipulation and confidence that we see in the origin-play. They escape together with the full potential to rise to power, through whatever obstacles, fuelling each other's aspirations. Thus, the play relies on *Macbeth* as its primary source, and as a prequel, it is shaped to be able to smoothly blend into *Macbeth.*

However, Bottomley creates a unique historicised vision, in which Lady Macbeth is presented as a quasi-historical figure. Lady Macbeth, despite the myths and mystery about her, is a historical figure, about whom very little is known apart from her name, her role and her royal descent. Most of what we know about her derived from the single

mention of her name during their reign in the record of a land grant to St Andrew's Church, that states that the benefactors are "Macbeth, son of Finlach and Gruoch, daughter of Bodhe, king and queen of Scotland."7 Olga L. Valbuena aptly concludes that while "modern historians have placed Gruoch in the regnal genealogy, early chronicles excluded or divorced her" from it, and "in the chronicles and histories that Shakespeare read, her story now obscured from the historical record, she serves as the embodiment of the ruthless 'lust of ambition' that came to be associated with Macbeth's rise to power" (103). She adds that "lacking historical voice and context" Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth necessarily emerges as "a spiteful woman […] without rational motivation" (103). This was the image that Bottomley's *Gruach* was meant to overturn precisely by ensuring the reinstating of Lady Macbeth into her royal and political position.

In Bottomley's play she regains her first name Gruach, and her genealogy and royal ancestry are highlighted in several utterances, most notably when she says to Macbeth after his proposal "Sir, are you sure of me? Before you take me / You should be told I was born your enemy: / I am of a more ancient house of kings / Than you: King Kenneth was among my fathers" (47).8 The suggested scenery and costumes given in stage directions (7) as well as the references to Gruach's royal ancestry and the need for uniting the lands/power of different families from Morag (11) and from Conan (66), also support the quasi-historical setting. The historical overtones suit the purpose of the genre quite conveniently, as for the audience it creates the much required sense of probability and credibility and also a hint of reliability, which are generally expected in prequels to provide the back-story, the history *per se* of prominent characters and certain events in their lives.

However, Bottomley did not go for a historically apt backstory in some of the most important questions. To draw up a smoother and more in-character path for the future Lady Macbeth, he omitted certain historical indications. Bottomley highlights the historical elements known about Gruach that can be fused with his own beautiful,

virginal, young, independent seductress, but disregards the historical facts known and used even by Shakespeare's text – which is otherwise less constrained by historical fidelity issues, although we do know that "the succession questions (mystified in the play) were openly treated in Holinshed, Buchanan, and other probable sources" (Carroll). *Macbeth* notoriously "bears traces of [Lady Macbeth's] marital and maternal history in scattered and allusive remarks that correspond uncannily to what is known from her life" (Valbuena 104). Bottomley does not wish to interfere with the Shakespearean dramaturgy much, does not aim to undermine the Shakespearean drama – on the contrary, he does everything to comply with the text and the mystic world of *Macbeth.* However, it is quite remarkable that he disregards the much debated utterance of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare ("I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me..."9) – which is the only remark Shakespeare weaved into his story from historical sources about Lady Macbeth's past. Bottomley uses history to create a strong, vivid future-Lady-Macbeth with a regal claim, but with the same gesture, precisely by refusing to integrate the history of her previous marriage and her son from another marriage, he also deconstructs the history that Shakespeare's text is based on. Thus, he does not provide the backstory for one of the most sought-after mysteries of the Macbeths – the sorely missing heir to their bloody enterprise.

He does, however, supply the readers with the most patent and spellbinding fiction, using iconic images and themes from the Shakespearean *Macbeth* – and this sense of Shakespearean consistency seems overwhelming as opposed to the inconsistency traced in the conveniently selected historical data. In the culminating scene of the Envoy and Gruach (Scene II), Bottomley evokes both the sleepwalking of Lady Macbeth and the murderous dagger of Macbeth. The guilt-troubled sleepwalking of Lady Macbeth is transformed into the habit of an extravagant mind in Gruach's character and sleepwalking in general is considered as a menacing constitution of her future, which might cause her death. Fern, right at the beginning of the play in Scene I (well before Gruach comes on stage) recalls Gruach's sleepwalking the previous night and concludes that she "dared not follow or move,

for I had heard / That if sleep-walkers are wakened they may die" (10). In the second scene Gruach is actually seen sleepwalking, and in her sleep, she confesses her love to Macbeth, who wakes her, and revives her with a kiss after she collapses. Sleepwalking becomes not only a steady reference point to Shakespeare's text – where Lady Macbeth is reported to die in/after (waking from?) the iconic sleepwalking scene – but also a pervasive reinterpretation of Lady Macbeth. The prequel chooses to opt for a Lady Macbeth who is mentally unstable *from the beginning* and is not of this world: she is not motivated by sheer and incomparable ambition for greatness, and her sleepwalking is not a poignant act deriving from unbearable guilt over murder and instigation to murder, but is a regular occurrence in her life. On the one hand, her guilt, which ultimately makes her mad in Shakespeare, is subsided by her habitual sleepwalking by Bottomley; on the other hand, their Shakespearean unity is reinforced, making Gruach indeed *part of* Macbeth, by the symbolic "kiss of life" that would bring her back to consciousness.

The other conspicuous reference to Shakespeare, the dagger – the symbol most immediately connected to the Macbeths, perhaps – is also invoked for a more direct connection to Shakespeare. In a vivid micro-monologue, Gruach not only foreshadows the sly murder of Duncan, but also takes hold of the dagger, and with it her own conduct, and threatens to kill the Envoy/Macbeth, saying:

> […] thieves are men of the night: murderers
> Are men of the night. You have the stoats and foumart's
> Passion for throats in the dark: you are not one
> Who kills in the open, you would kill in sleep and
> In the vile safety of a private room.
> Faugh, you foul treacherous beast […]
> My hand is on your dagger: let go your hold,
> Or I'll drive it down the side of your neck (41).

The passage is a quite vivid example of how Bottomley employs typically Shakespearean features in his play to sustain the inevitable connection between the plays: Gruach here, regaining consciousness after sleepwalking, is trying to fight the Envoy, and by her words she

practically describes the future murder, concluding her speech in seizing the dagger. Later she holds up her hair with the same dagger, merging a most feminine attribute with an explicitly and symbolically masculine object, portending her "unsexed" decisive ambition escalating in the murder of Duncan. In the last pages, after the couple has left and the house is waking up, the Girl recounts her dream – claiming she sees Gruach at nights, and here the image of the crown appears as a token of power, and blood also manifests itself in the colour red:

> She wears a golden crown as if she is a queen.
> Her pitiless face alarms, […]
> Her gaze is hard to me, […]
> Nightly she bears a dagger. […]
> She bears a dagger, a red dagger. . . (62)

Bottomley creates these scenes based on the most common associations with Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* and yet he consistently shifts the focus onto Lady Macbeth. As a result, Gruach emerges as a historically well-defined character, consciously reminding the readers/viewers of her own authority and authenticity: as a historical figure she is able to provide a credible "origin" for Lady Macbeth. However, her vivid personality, virginal and yet extravagant beauty and her otherworldly behaviour seem to define her even more emphatically, and these entirely fictional character traits, supported by the recognisably Shakespearean motifs, are reinforced by the conveniently omitted historical data about a previous marriage and her motherhood. The historically more defined but still more prominently fictional Gruach's skills in manipulating Macbeth are dynamically presented throughout the play, and she is ready to carry the blame for their fall more obviously in the upcoming events of their future embodied in the origin-play, *Macbeth*.

Historical resistance

David Greig's *Dunsinane* was written in 2010, at a time when Shakespeare had already been reintegrated from the heights of bardolatry among those massively popular, dazzling canonized authors,

whose works are no longer seen as unchallengeable universal truths, but are there to be taken apart, criticized, disputed, de- and reconstructed. Adaptations (prequels and sequels among them) are no longer expected to conform and show reverence towards the monumental genius of Shakespeare, but are the ultimate way to question, reinterpret and revitalize the plays – and this way they open up new territories of discussion. Consequently, in this sequel, we see a quite different attitude to the Shakespearean text than that of Bottomley's approach.

Greig, unlike Bottomley, approaches the overwhelming Shakespearean universe with the typical *double gesture* described by Lynne Bradley as one which:

> constitutes both a figurative collaboration with […] as well as a deliberate rejection of the author, an assertion that original meaning is either irretrievably lost to us or no longer desirable. […] it allows us to author and experience new works and new ideas that express twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns without severing all ties to the cultural traditions that underlie our society. (7)

Greig is also very consciously building upon the Shakespearean text, as Wallace claims, "[the] play's title explicitly hails its predecessor and the location of its concluding action" (92). The play opens with a quotation from Shakespeare ("What wood is this before us?"10) to make that link even more prominent. However, Greig masterfully undermines the very essence of *Macbeth* by placing the much admired and debated – and by Shakespeare quite unsurprisingly killed off – Lady Macbeth in a central position within the play, as Gruach, queen of Scotland. "It alters the focus of the source text, directing us away from Shakespeare's tyrant to the site of his demise" (Wallace 92) and beyond that, to the tyrant's widow, who is very much alive. Greig refers back to Shakespeare's play only to deconstruct its essence and leads its passage through the sequel into a political drama relying on historical sources much more than either Shakespeare or Bottomley, for that matter.

Perhaps precisely by this more overt reliance on history and defiance of Shakespeare, Greig's play is more political than other adaptations of *Macbeth*. From the beginning (as intended by Greig himself) *Dunsinane* was interpreted as a play that depicts the oppression of a foreign land, a foreign culture and society in order to maintain peace as defined by outsider forces; the parallels were immediate with Afghanistan and Iraq and the peacekeeping forces – but the play, precisely because it is set in a distant, "Shakespearean," familiarly opaque past, can be elevated to be interpreted on a more universal level. As Greig himself is quoted in a review,11 "[w]hen the play went to London, the story was Afghanistan. When the play was touring Scotland, the story was the referendum — it was all about Scotland and England. And when the play went to Russia, the story was the Ukraine."

It seems that the play which originally depicts events in the 11th century was easily converted into something universal about foreign oppression and invasion in general. However most of the analyses written about *Dunsinane* highlight this political approach and interpretation, and I think that to see *Dunsinane* mainly/only as a political play deriving from the Shakespearean vision deprives us of a highly interesting reading regarding the relationship between the Shakespearean play and its adaptations in general.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has always been considered a play that bears particular relevance in countries that either experience some form of overwhelming polarised political juncture, or face acute (and generally unwanted) changes imposed by a given political system. For instance, there were nineteen sizeable UK performances of *Macbeth* in 2018, and in January 2019 there were two prominent Budapest *Macbeth* premieres, which were playing to full houses until the moment theatres were closed down for the 2020 pandemic. As Jack Rear sums it up, these instances can be interpreted as a "response to a precarious political climate" – including insecurities about Brexit, the controversies emerging during the presidency of Trump, the #metoo movement and, I would add, especially in the case of Hungary, the

forcedly centralised political decisions unopen for public discussion, often disregarding scientific or expert opinions.

Greig also wished to employ the political power-readings of *Macbeth,* but he twisted the concept of oppression presenting Shakespeare *as* the oppressor who is overthrown: in *Dunsinane,* instead of the inner power-struggles and controversies of a country, oppression and intrusion by an outsider, foreign power is presented, and it seems that Greig undermines and plays with the enormous literary heritage of *Macbeth* on several levels to achieve this. On the one hand the text he created (similarly to Bottomley's technique) consciously and carefully avoids the name of Macbeth and refers to him constantly as a king or a tyrant instead. However, at the same time we hear Gruach lament the death of Macbeth remembering him as a good king and a good leader:

> *Gruach sits with the body of the old king.*
> *Gruach's women sing a lament.*
> *Siward watches.*
> Gruach: He was a good king.
> He ruled for fifteen years.
> Before him there were kings and kings and kings
> but not one of them could rule more
> than a year or so at most before he would be killed
> by some chief or other.
> But my king lasted fifteen years.
> My king was strong (32).12

By a decisive and to some extent forced solution, neither the stage direction, nor Gruach herself mentions the old king's name, not even at this elevated moment of grief, which recalls him – as if it were not important or as if it were a remnant of history faded into oblivion (much like Lady Macbeth's own name is never mentioned in Shakespeare's text). The text excludes Macbeth, the Shakespearean figure and involves Macbeth the historical figure, about whom we do not know much – not even his name – but he is reported to be good, and to have spent an impressive fifteen years on the throne.

Macbeth is only partly reinstated in his position in the play by being referred to as a good king. He is also further unsexed and weakened as a potent man (of a potent text). As opposed to other adaptations thematizing Lady Macbeth's personal life13 where one of the most prominent traumas shaping her personality is the loss of her child(ren) and her body's failure (miscarriages and barrenness) to produce an heir, in *Dunsinane* the historical and political Gruach emerges as a woman of full potential, spiritually just as much as physically. In Greig's play there is no mention of why she does not have children with Macbeth, but her ability to bear a son and heir is already proven by the very existence of her son Lulach from her previous marriage; therefore, the already unsexed Macbeth of Shakespeare14 is further weakened in *Dunsinane,* killed off while running, "A spear in his back" (25) – making his (and, notably, not Gruach's) impotence/infertility a more plausible reason for their lack of children.

Although the avoidance and fading of Macbeth is a typical method by which Greig distances his play's position, making it more independent of *Macbeth,* it seems evident, nevertheless, that the ultimate effect of the power-struggle the text wishes to represent and the sense of instability it strives to achieve require inevitable references that link them to the Shakespearean text to be more effective and approachable by the audience. The duality and the playful instability in Greig's text are achieved quite aptly by using the equivocal metaphor of the woods of *Macbeth*, that normally should be – and are expected to be – unmovable and steadfast. However, precisely from Shakespeare's play we know that this is not as evident as it seems: because the woods can actually go to Dunsinane and destroy the tyrant. The "wood before us" in the motto of *Dunsinane*, the seemingly unmovable and monumental Shakespearean text and its centuries old interpretative network *do* move and change, and go to Dunsinane, and *Dunsinane* is questioning this very steadfast monumentality with its series of double gestures, that of reviving Lady Macbeth and hailing the historical Macbeth's greatness – confronting all that Shakespeare's text is built on.

The woods in *Dunsinane* appear on several levels beyond the immediate quote from *Macbeth.* On the one hand, we see the transformation of the army of Malcolm and the English *into* the woods (in one of the delightfully comic and yet profound passages of the play), where the Sergeant is attempting to create a suasive wood to go to Dunsinane, and concluding that "The forest is made of trees and in between the trees the darkness. It's not the something that fools the eyes but the nothing in between" (11). It is as if the essence of Greig's adaptation technique is described in the words of the Sergeant and the way he elucidates the answers for the soldiers: the Sergeant is creating the woods, as the author is creating the text; from woods (steady textual reference points) and from the nothing, the darkness (the textual gaps and inconsistencies) to overcome the tyrant (the unavoidable yet historically and politically imprecise interpretative pressure tied to the Shakespearean oeuvre).

The way the English invade the castle of Dunsinane using the disguise of the woods can be read as an analogy of the English Shakespeare's overwhelming story invading and altering Scottish history in Greig's play. There are further, more direct references in the play to the English-Scottish tension, and the most prominent ones are built up around Gruach, who, by her sole survival of the conflict, defies the plot and legacy of *Macbeth.* She is first seen after the victorious takeover of Dunsinane by the English, and she is confronted with the supposed supremacy of the English language imposed on Scots. Siward approaches her in total ignorance of her identity with a condescending attitude – to be shocked by the reality of Scottish history as opposed to the fiction of the English narrative Malcolm communicates. Gruach defines her place not as a location but as Queen ("My place here is Queen" 27), and the whole carefully built-up narrative of England as a restoring order falls apart.

The superiority of identity by language – English – crumbles away when Siward and his men face the resistance of Scotland in their own language's potential: communication becomes lost in translation for the English, whereas the Gaelic language provides the freedom and

the power of communication for the Scots, and especially Gruach. The wood image is also brought back by Gruach to illustrate the dichotomy prevailing between the opposing forces, and it presses the wood-metaphor established between the texts (the origin-play and the adaptation) one step further, onto the level of language and culture in general. She teases Siward about not speaking Gaelic and suggests he should learn it. She says:

> Your English is a woodworker's tool. Siward. Hello, goodbye, that tree is green, simple matters. A soldier's language sent out to capture the world in words. Always trying to describe. Throw words at a tree and eventually you'll force me to see the tree just as you see it. We long since gave up believing in descriptions. Our language is the forest. (76)

Her language lesson leaves Siward confused, asking "Which of us is really the conqueror here and which of us the conquered?" (77) – and Gruach maintains this dichotomy with her very existence as Queen, as lover, as enemy, with her every utterance and action, which remain undecipherable for Siward and the English.

English becomes the artificial oppressor (pretending to be a forest) against the wild and naturally untameable potential of Gaelic, and Gruach, as the speaker of *both* languages will hold an especially powerful position in manipulating the events around her. Her mysterious language is just one obstacle for the English to overcome, because there is a more complex web of myths and beliefs that are based on the widespread misconceptions and sensational horror circulating around her story – again deeply rooted in (and familiar for us from) the very myth Shakespeare created for Lady Macbeth's role. At one point she is asked whether she really eats babies – and she goes along with the nonsensical gossip and exaggerates it, claiming it is true, and highlighting how tender baby meat is (60). Here again we have a quite obvious resonance to the hypothetically breastfed and willingly killed baby of Lady Macbeth – and her most inexplicable and mysterious utterance is subverted and belittled into the remnants of questionable folk tales and fantasies.

Gruach, the historically apt queen figure fighting for her son's right is seen by the English constantly as an undefinable character, with the potential for witchcraft and magic granted to her based on the fiction well known to the English trying to get hold of her. It is further complicating her role that she deliberately uses this myth to manipulate the events, and does not seek to clarify either her plans and her motivations (she has an affair with Siward, then agrees to marry Malcolm, then disappears from Dunsinane) or her true nature. Remarkably, although she proves to be elusive, unfathomable and weird for her English conquerors – precisely by playing by their book, the obscure narrative of *Macbeth* – she remains historically consistent and unyielding in her son's (and his offspring's) claim to the crown and her identity as Queen of Scotland.

More importantly, a similar gesture of avoidance and acknowledgement can be traced in Greig's undermining the reliability of the Shakespearean text by keeping Gruach alive and by placing her – a sane, sensible and powerful queen – in the centre, similarly to Bottomley and in accordance with the side-lining of the name "Macbeth." While *Dunsinane* keeps Lady Macbeth alive, revolving around the question of inheritance by her only son from a previous marriage (the heir sorely missing though referred to in *Macbeth15*) and portrays Macbeth as a ruler who was more successful and more just than any other before him in the century, the sequel deconstructs and undermines the major themes of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Shakespeare depicted self-destruction by ambition through the universal story of one man shown on both highly public and deeply personal levels. The rise and the fall of Macbeth both happen with intertwining public and private spheres: ambition for a prominent public role was fuelled by a deeply troubled private relationship, the fruitless marriage of the Macbeths. By the end Macbeth simultaneously lost his public role and, with the death of his wife, the very foundation of his private life as well.

Dunsinane reintroduces history and real politics into the story and disregards this universality of the tragic established by Shakespeare. In Greig's play Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is an alternative reality, summed up

in Malcolm's account of what had taken place in Scotland. Malcolm's story contains all the elements that we are essentially familiar with from Shakespeare's play – namely that Gruach went mad and died and everybody hated Macbeth because he was a tyrant who needed to be overthrown. In *Dunsinane,* it turns out that this had all been lies and a fabrication of a story in a way that suited Malcolm's political intentions. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is thus masterfully undermined and downgraded onto the level of pure fable disregarding historical evidence. The early-modern Shakespearean narrative so familiar to audiences is overlapping (if not simply *is*) the unreliable narrative conveyed by Malcolm, which, in order to justify a change of regime in Scotland and the interference of England, presents a manipulated and fictional backstory.

Endgame

Coincidentally, the ending in both plays is set in winter. In Bottomley's case Gruach is riding with the Envoy towards their Shakespearean future in the snow which is covering their traces; their sudden escape and Gruach's arbitrary decision to marry Macbeth subverts the historicity of the play and gives way to fiction to offer a suitable past for the inseparable Shakespearean couple, complying with *Macbeth* fully. In Greig's play Gruach reveals to Siward that there is an heir to the Scottish throne, and by presenting the baby, she holds the promise of resistance – both to the invading forces within the play, and, on a more symbolic level, to the overwhelming presence of English culture (and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in particular) in her own history. As Carroll sums it up, "her resistance is rendered patriotic to the highest degree, inextricably linked to her royal identity", the royal lineage emphasized in both the sequel and the prequel, and she "not only survives, but somehow endures, a heroic, mystical figure of beauty, resistance, and agency."

In conclusion, we can certainly say that although both plays use the effect of historicity and reset the focus to an extreme degree from Macbeth and onto Gruach, it seems that their attitudes to *Macbeth*

turn out to be crucially different: *Gruach* changing the history of the protagonist to fit *Macbeth*; *Dunsinane*, on the other hand, insisting on history to totally distance and undermine *Macbeth*'s legacy. Interestingly, however, in both cases readers and audiences might face a loss of complexity, a sense of simplification of the familiarly obscure Lady Macbeth. Although history and fable make Bottomley's Gruach more unstable and more unpredictable, at the same time Lady Macbeth is deprived of both her maternity and her troubled conscience confused by overwhelming guilt. In *Dunsinane,* the historical figure is more important than her Shakespearean complexity – and Greig's Gruach is nowhere near madness, has no troubled conscience or a mystic past: she is a manipulative politician, playing for sovereignty.

Any attempt to create a more stable historical relevance to Lady Macbeth would necessarily narrow down the possible interpretations of the main female character, because, as Carroll concludes, any such rewriting would "attempt to normalize and domesticate [*Macbeth*]'s wildness, its strangeness, its ellipses, refusals, and erasures." By waking the slumbering historical past of Lady Macbeth, these two plays seem to remake the too difficult, too arbitrary Shakespearean character into less complicated, more relatable characters: the Gruachs are well concocted remnants of the Lady Macbeth they are interacting with, one accepting and complying with, one rejecting the Shakespearean origin.

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1 Hutcheon quotes from Marjorie Garber's *Quotation Marks* (2003) here.

2 I prefer to use the compound "origin-play" when discussing adaptations and appropriations, among them prequels and sequels; the much used word 'source' with a similar meaning seems to be more directly referring to historical sources that are taken over with a more objective use, less changed or transmuted by artistic freedom. "Origin" can refer back to but also consciously avoids and thus markedly stands opposed to the use of "original" plays used in older, more fidelity-based adaptation theories.

3 Cf. Shakespeare: *Macbeth,* Act I Scene 7, 74. All quotations from Macbeth are taken from Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth.* Arden, Routledge, 1994.

4 A quote taken from Lascelles Abercrombie's review in *The Liverpool Daily Post*, quoted in Gordon Bottomley: *Gruach and Britain's Daughter;* 1925: 126. My italics, F. A.

5 Cf. George C. Cross: *Mary Cowden Clarke, "The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines," and the Sex Education of Victorian Women* p.38

6 Cf. Lady Macbeth's story in Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines,* p. 99.

7 Cf. a more detailed analysis of this particular historical source in Nick Aitchison's *Macbeth: Man and Myth*, Sutton, 1999: 48.

8 All quotations from the play are taken from *Gruach and Britain's Daughter* by Gordon Bottomley, Constable and co. 1925. Numbers indicate page number.

9 Act I Scene 7 lines 54-59; for all quotations from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* I use The Arden Shakespeare, 2015.

10 It is said by Siward himself, in Act 5, scene 4.

11 Quoted in Chris Jones' review in the *Los Angeles Times.*

12 All quotations are taken from David Greig: *Dunsinane,* Faber and Faber 2010. Numbers indicate page number.

[13] For example, Susan Fraser King's novel *Lady Macbeth,* or *Lady Macbeth's Daughter* by Lisa Klein; or Jo Nesbo's *Macbeth.*

[14] Lady Macbeth notoriously questions Macbeth's manhood repeatedly, see for example Act III Scene 4 from line 57 ("Are you a man?"); this has been several times connected with his inability to produce an heir, hinting at his lack of performance and power as a man, cf. Maria L. Howell's book, *Manhood and Masculine Identity in William Shakespeare's* The Tragedy of Macbeth, pp. 14-15.

[15] Cf. Macbeth's reference to his hope on a future son in Act I Scene 7 lines 73-75. ("Bring forth men-children only! / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males.") and the several prominent, influential classic interpretations revolving around the lack of a son for the Macbeths; e.g.: Cleanth Brooks (pp. 214-215), James L. Calderwood (p. 60-61) and more recently Géza Kállay (pp. 128-129).